

Palmer (C.R.)

The Claims of Our Hospital.

A SERMON,

Preached on Hospital Sunday, Jan'y 11, 1885,

IN THE

First Congregational Church,

BY

Rev. CHARLES RAY PALMER, Pastor.

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THE CLAIMS OF OUR HOSPITAL.

LUKE ix. 2.—And he sent them forth to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Some of you may remember to have seen a rather striking paper by Prof. Stuart Blackie which appeared a few years since, on the utilization of evil. If so you will very readily recall the main position taken and felicitously illustrated in it. In answer to the question for what purpose do the evils in the world exist, he lays down the principle that evil exists that there may be a field for the manifestation of goodness. The grandest characteristics of man, physical and moral, are developed through his masterful struggles with an ungenial environment. The farmer, what would evoke his hardy virtues were there no barren or stony fields, no forests or wilderness, no weeds or vermin, no frost or drought or flood? Were there no tempests of wind and wave, the sailor's heroism would no longer be tasked; the triumphs of seamanship would be unknown. If there were no prevailing ignorance and stupidity, the occupation of the vast army whose life work is found in grappling with the great tasks of education, and whose own intellectual development is conditioned by those tasks, would be gone. If there were no political tasks in the world's government there would be no statesmen or soldiers. In short, were there no want, there would be no work, and of course no call for successful and admirable workers. Were there no pauperism, misery, disease or wounds, there would be no call for philanthropy, charity, mercy, and no arena for the display of the fairest sympathies, and the finest energies of the human soul. If there were no temptations, what possibility would there be of robust virtue, what praise in righteousness, what dignity in moral courage?

Whether or no we judge with this writer,

whose thought I have followed without quoting his language, the final cause of evil is thus indicated; whether or no we are ready to think evil exists in order that good may be manifested; of one thing we can make no doubt, it is in the face of evil that goodness is actually manifested. That is where we see it and recognize it. In the ever fresh, the ever resolute, the ever unconquerable struggle with evils persisting and abounding, we discern what goodness is, and learn to admire and to emulate its praise and its recompense. This is even true of the divine goodness. It is in its answer to human guilt that we perceive and adore divine grace. It is in the midst of the suffering, the diseased, the impotent and the dying, that we see and learn to appreciate the love and the power of the Savior of mankind. In apprehending the world's awful need of redemption, we begin to apprehend the unsearchable riches of our blessed Redeemer's love.

We easily pass from this great truth to the thought that evils in the midst of us are a perpetual appeal to the best impulses and best endeavors of which we are susceptible; a perpetual summons to generous affection and to beneficent work. Human want and human woe call loudly upon Christian love. That this is an oft-repeated lesson of the gospel, I need not tarry to show. My present purpose has in view a particular application of this lesson. Our Lord laid upon His disciples the duty of healing the sick. I cannot but think His precept includes within it the charge to provide the best possible facilities, and use the best attainable means, in order to the discharge of that duty. My theme is the claim of the hospital upon Christian beneficence.

I. In pursuance of this theme I wish first to remind you of the singular dignity given by Christ to all works of mercy. The text says specifically "heal the sick;" but in the

parallel passages we read an amplified form of this charge; e. g. in Matthew it is: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils—freely ye have received, freely give!" Evidently the range of their operations was not to be restricted to any one type of beneficence, it was to embrace all, and they were to do these things in connection with preaching or proclaiming the Kingdom of God. They were to do these works of mercy as illustrating the truth of their proclamation; as evincing that in a new and an important sense the reign of God on earth had begun. Similarly when John the Baptist from his gloomy dungeon in the mountains beyond the Dead Sea, sent his disciples to Jesus with the question whether He were indeed the Coming One, the Messiah of Israel, the Desire of Nations; when, that is, the great prophet asked of Jesus a fuller unfolding of the evidence He was that Coming One, you remember the manner of the response. He said: "Go and tell John the things ye now see and hear;" and "in that hour," we read, "He cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and on many that were blind He bestowed sight." That was His answer to His questioner. He does not say, "I am the Coming One," but "tell John of the power I am revealing; tell John I am healing the sicknesses and infirmities of mankind; tell John of the mercy and the might you have seen, delivering the diseased and raising the dead; he will know what these things mean!" These demonstrations of the love and the power of which He was the embodiment He appealed to as satisfying proofs that the King had come. Could there be a more impressive indication of the fact that Christ regarded the healing of the diseased, the mitigation of distress, and all of what we call works of charity and mercy, an integral part, and an important integral part, of the work He came to do in the world; of the redemption of mankind? And as we know, the work which He had Himself begun, He laid upon His followers to carry on. "As the Father sent Me into the world, even so send I you." He even went farther than to lay this work upon them as a matter of obligation. In most solemn and tender words He intimated He

should measure the love of His followers for Himself by the love which they showed to the wretched and the needy; that in the hour of their final judgment His highest word of approval would be—"I was hungry and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger and ye took Me in; I was naked, and ye clothed Me; I was sick, and ye visited Me; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. For what ye have done to one of the least of these my brethren ye have done unto Me!" With what greater dignity could works of mercy be invested, than they are by these words of Christ? Can we receive those words as His and not feel the strongest impulse to the ministrations which He describes? If indeed He wanted, would our hearts be slow, or our hands unready, to supply His needs? If He wanted a house in which to be cared for, would we not build it? If He wanted nursing, and attendance, and food, and the appliances of comfort, and healing, would we not make haste to provide them all, and that with a lavish hand? Am I wrong, if the remembrance of His example, and of His words, leads me to believe Him interested profoundly in every house of mercy; to imagine Him pointing to our own institution to say, "what you have done there, you have done unto Me! What you will do there you will do unto Me! Let naught be lacking there, if you love Me!"

II. I advance to remark (2nd) the hospital is a distinctively Christian institution in its history. The earliest disciples of Christianity did not fail to respond to the spirit and the teachings and the example of their Divine Master. You remember that the very first trace of formal organization in the Christian church which we discover in the acts of the apostles, is a movement to secure a better distribution of charity to those in need of it. It is also worth remembering that one of the earliest results of the political triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire was the promulgation of laws for the protection of the feeble and the helpless. In no particular did Christianity more sharply contrast with Paganism than in its thus awakening and directing care for the needy and the misera-

ble. The Roman poet Ovid, who died in our Lord's lifetime, could reckon upon applause in saying as he did: "Wherefore should one give anything to the poor? One deprives one's self of what one gives, and only helps the other to prolong a wretched life!" Contrast Christ with the spirit of that utterance! When the Emperor Julian, the apostate, undertook to reverse the work of Constantine, and extirpate Christianity in the Roman Empire, he attempted from his Pagan and humanistic standpoint, to rival the benevolent institutions of Christianity, because of the advantage these gave it over the Paganism that had known them not. He dared not restore Paganism in its utter heartlessness and its many cruelties. By its development of the kindlier spirit, which originated with it, Christianity wrought most effectively upon a suffering world, and achieved most shining successes. From the time it became a power in the world, it established everywhere a multitude of various institutions, until then unknown and unimagined; buildings for the reception of strangers and travelers; alms houses for the poor, orphan houses, homes for the helpless aged, and hospitals for the sick and suffering. It was thus Christians labored to reproduce and perpetuate the life of Christ among men. The bishops of the 4th century vied with each other in the most munificent charity. Basil, of Caesarea, founded one of the earliest hospitals. *It was called the *Basilias*. In it strangers were hospitably entertained, and the sick were received whatever was their disease, and provided with nursing, and medical attendance. In it were residences for physicians, and workshops for artizans, and all its appointments, were on the most generous scale. Basil himself was an ascetic, and a promoter of monasticism.

It is commonly said that the hospital of modern times is an outgrowth of the monastery. It is so far true, that every monastery had its infirmary, where not the sick only, but the blind, the aged, and the indigent, were housed and cared for, and in process of time, with the growth of the monasteries, and of the communities about them, separate

buildings had to be erected for infirmaries, and these are undoubtedly the prototypes of the modern hospitals. About the earliest record of the building of a hospital, i. e., a building specifically for hospital purposes, is in the life of Archbishop Lanfranc, who, in 1080, founded two, one for lepers, and one for ordinary diseases. Hospitals continued to be ecclesiastical establishments until the Reformation, when some of the monasteries were appropriated and made public hospitals, being generally put under municipal control. The eighteenth century saw such institutions wonderfully multiplied, and now their number, and the wealth of their endowments is past all statement. Seldom, now, have they any ecclesiastical connection; and doubtless they are better without it; but it was the church which originated them; it was Christian love and Christian enterprise which built and maintained them, until a Christianized society assumed them and made them a public charge. Certainly I am justified in claiming from these facts, that the hospital, whatever shape it takes at present, is a distinctively Christian institution in its history, and as such it appeals just as much as ever to Christian sentiment and Christian beneficence for sympathy and support. It is only by reason of a legitimate division of a duty that Christian people, revering the precept of the Master, now preach the Kingdom of God in one edifice, and heal the sick in another. It is in recognition, I trust, of the same obligation in either case.

III. I pass to remark, 3d, institutions of mercy are commonly regarded the consummate flower of the Christianity of this century, and as such they have their special claims upon every Christian community and every Christian man. The great distinction of this century, probably, in the future, from a religious point of view, will be the wonderful outbreak and development of voluntary effort, personal and organized, in the direction of humane, beneficent, philanthropic and evangelistic enterprise. One of the earliest inventions, we may say, of this inventive epoch, was the benevolent association, or corporation, aspiring and empowered to do

*Neand. in Ch. Hist.

a thousand good things, which men would once have imagined only the church or the state could undertake. Most marvellously have such associations multiplied; very great tasks have they accomplished, and they in turn have stirred up the state to do great and good things, which otherwise it might have neglected. If you have not had your attention turned to the facts, to investigate the progress of humanity and mercy in this period will give you many surprises. The state of Massachusetts within a very few years spent \$2,000,000 on an asylum for the insane. Do you appreciate it is not a hundred years since the insane were treated like wild beasts, in some Christian lands even? Perhaps it is not unfair to make that instance a sample of the change modern society has undergone in the general direction of humanity; and it is historically unmistakable that the inspiration of the change is Christian. A heathen visitor to our shores, whose rank and official relations made him the object of polite attentions, was shown among other things many of our public buildings. Before he left us he remarked to a friend, "your prisons, your dungeons, your scaffolds and your armies, I understand. My country can outdo you in such things, but your orphan asylums, and your old men's homes astonish me, and your homes for old women would seem to my people ridiculous." Yes, very likely, and so to the very finest representatives of the ancient civilizations who could be mentioned, or the finest representatives of the culture or the religion of the oldest non-Christian civilizations of to-day that could be selected, many more of our institutions of mercy would seem incomprehensible; neither we may boldly say, would an atheistic people ever have built them. But in this Christian land they stand, paid for by private donations, or by taxation willingly endured, and their name is legion—homes for the foundling, the orphan, the forsaken, the idiot, the friendless and the aged; asylums for the blind, the deaf and dumb, the disabled, the inebriate; reformatories, dispensaries, refuges, private and public hospitals, special and general—who could chronicle the long list of them?—in their variety, as in the ad-

mirable appointments of some of them, witness of the wealth of the Christian sentiment from which they have sprung. And of all shall we not recognize in the hospital the very chief, as meeting the sorest needs, at the largest outlay, with the best practical result. It seems to me that in London's thousand charitable institutions, and eminently in its thirty hospitals, we see the high-water mark of its Christianity, as truly as in its imposing Cathedral, and its parish churches. I cannot help judging both from the light of history, and from the nature of the case, that the hospital is one of the most direct outgrowths of the Christian life of a community; and one of the best measures of the genuineness and intensity of that life is to be seen in the outflowing of kindly sympathies, and of wise liberality in keeping the hospital in its every department up to the highest standard of attractiveness and usefulness. I would have the very atmosphere of it bespeak the fact that it was founded and is maintained in whole hearted and unsparing Christian love. Ought not the Christian sentiment of such a community as this to see in such an institution the fairest possible opportunity to display how fully it apprehends the precepts of Christ, and how thoroughly it has absorbed His spirit? The poor and the sick we have with us always, and they have the strongest claims upon our consideration as the followers of Christ, if they be viewed severally; what shall we say if they be one and the same, and that the claim be doubled? Can any need press more imperatively than that? Can anything meet that need like an institution where the best professional skill; the most ample arrangements for cleanliness, comfort, and hygiene; and these directed and regulated in a large Christian wisdom and kindness, await even the humblest sufferer? Should any Christian community rest, until such an institution is a fact, and a permanent fact in the midst of it?

Christian friends, our fair city, ancient though its beginnings are, has attained its present proportions by a very rapid growth in a few years. It is fairly comparable not with cities that have slowly matured through

centuries, but with those who have sprung into existence in a generation. It is no discredit if we acknowledge that the growth of our population has been far more rapid, than the development among us of those institutions in which are recognized the best aspirations of an enlightened Christian people. But no one can have failed to perceive in recent years at least the beginning of those institutions, and the awakening of public interest in them. After a five years' patient and persistent struggle, which began with a very few—perhaps we should say with one—we have at length a hospital building, sufficiently complete to be open for the reception of patients. The munificent gifts of a goodly number, the contributions of far more, the wise aid of the commonwealth, have secured to this community and this county, this great blessing. It has cost nearly a hundred thousand dollars, and seems to be admirably adapted to answer its beneficent purposes for a long while to come. We all rejoice, no doubt, in the accomplishment of so much. But it is most important that we understand our task is not completed. It is only well and hopefully begun. It certainly needs to be fully paid for, as it is not yet. It certainly needs to be completed, as it is not yet. But even this is not all. It cannot be kept open, and maintained at its highest attainable usefulness, without large annual expenditures. If these have to be met by proportionally large charges, it cannot be regarded as in all respects a charitable institution, and certainly its doors will not stand open to those who most need to be taken there. It will not be what we wish it to be, and what it ought to be, until it is liberally endowed, until it has an income from its endowments sufficient easily and amply to provide for all possible demands upon it. For such endowments we must look to those who are able from their abundance to grant them. Doubtless they will come in due time, in the growth of Christian liberality in the county, and especially in this section of it in which the institution stands. A good beginning has been made.

But meanwhile, what is the institution to do? What is to meet its immediate

and urgent needs? What can meet them save the gifts of the many; the continuous outflow of our bounty toward it in such measure as our ability permits? I trust this most fitting designation of one Sabbath in the year for the purpose will make every church one source of generous supplies, and I trust our hearts may be always responsive, and our hands may be always open whenever occasions remind us of the Hospital's unending need in accomplishing its unending work. It will do what we enable it to do. It will admirably assist us to fulfill our obligations to Christ and our fellow men, if we rightly measure those obligations, and are prompt to supply it with what is requisite for the purpose. When its indebtedness is extinguished and all its apartments are finished and furnished, and its income—either from invested funds or from habitual contributions—is ample to provide for its expenses, then, and not until then, will it become what so many desire to see it, a House of Mercy open and free to all comers. Let us do what we can to hasten that day. And let what we do be done with heartiness and good will, *not* as to an institution which asks favors of us, but as to one which belongs to us, and is the object of our affection and honest pride. Let us give its claims upon us the high place in our thoughts about them, to which they are justly entitled. Let our humane sympathies, and our Christian affections be alike enlisted in its behalf. Let us find pleasure in promoting its efficiency, and its adornment. Let us in a manner all become co-workers there with the Great Physician. And as from time there go forth from its doors, men and women, who have found there a new lease of life, whose tortured bodies have been relieved, whose weariness and distress have been dissipated, whose hearts have been made more responsive to all good, through the effect of the kindness they have experienced, our gifts, through the thanksgivings of these, shall indeed redound to the glory of God; our service shall be accepted of Him, as the savor of a sweet sacrifice. Friends, let your offerings now be made; and let them be worthy of yourselves, and of the purpose to which you dedicate them. And may God accept and bless us in this most becoming consecration!

